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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR S/CT RHONDA SHOR, DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA, AF/E

LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PTER ASEC ER

SUBJECT: ERITREA: 2008 COUNTRY REPORTS ON TERRORISM

REF: STATE 120019

GENERAL ASSESSMENT:

¶1. In 2008, Eritrea experienced no major act of international terrorism. The Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of African Affairs announced in August 2007 that the USG was compiling information in consideration of putting Eritrea on the List of State Sponsors of Terrorism for its alleged support of militant extremists in Somalia, including Al-Shabaab.

SAFE HAVEN ASSESSMENT

¶2. Post is unaware of any international terrorist group that uses Eritrea as a sanctuary/safe haven. However, the GSE provides sanctuary to members of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS), including Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, who was publicly reported as being in Asmara as late as December 2008. The GSE has provided regional groups such as the Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM), the Sudanese Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and ARS with a wide range of logistical support such as Eritrean passports.

The GSE professes it would know if foreign terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida were present in Eritrea. However, it has a long, porous land border with Sudan and extensive border on the Red Sea. With limited security resources to adequately patrol these borders, Post assumes groups would be able to unofficially enter/transit through Eritrea through one of these borders without the GSE's knowledge. In addition, most of the known terrorist or insurgent incidents within the country occur in remote areas.

For instance, in February of this year, Eritrean radio and the government website reported a bus carrying 60 passengers had detonated a land mine 28 miles west of Barentu in western Eritrea, on a previously cleared road. Two Eritreans were killed and over a dozen were wounded in the blast. In January, the government website reported a time bomb exploding in the business area of Tessenei that killed one person and injured eight others.

TERRORIST GROUPS/ORGANIZATIONS

¶3. Post is aware of the presence of Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, who has affiliation with the reportedly defunct Al Ittihad Al Islamia (AIAI). Members of the ARS have been present in Eritrea with the GSE's consent and full knowledge. While also not designated as terrorist groups, members of the OLF, ONLF, and JEM also reside and have offices in Asmara.

FOREIGN GOVERNMENT COOPERATION

¶4. The GSE has cooperated in providing overflight clearance to U.S. military aircraft engaged in the Global War on Terrorism. The GSE has linked broader cooperation on counterterrorism programs to the unresolved border dispute with Ethiopia and to a resolution of the ongoing conflict in Somalia.

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